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Sixty-first session

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New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Andrei Stratan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Stratan (Republic of Moldova): At the outset allow me to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session and to wish you every success in this very honourable and responsible position. My commendation also goes to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson.

I should also like to express my deepest appreciation and praise to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the commitment and determination he has shown in discharging his important duties. Concerning the forthcoming elections for the new Secretary-General, I take this opportunity to recall that eastern Europe is the only region that has not been represented in this high position. In this regard, we welcome the candidature of Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 still loom large in our memory. The fifth anniversary of this tragedy has again filled our television screens with horrific scenes of suffering and death. It has served to remind us of the resolve that is necessary to combat terrorism, which constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

With this in mind, Moldova fully supports the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted recently by the General Assembly, and welcomes the Assembly's decision to continue, during the current session, consideration of the Secretary-General's progress report on the prevention of armed conflict (A/60/891). We consider that the specific measures in the Strategy's plan of action are comprehensive in their details and far-reaching in their insight. We need to take practical steps individually and collectively to implement the provisions of the plan. Likewise, we believe that the recommendations outlined in the Secretary-General's progress report will serve as guiding points for Member States in preventing conflicts throughout the world.

Many regional organizations have been entrusted by the United Nations, under the provisions of Chapter VIII of the Charter, with dealing with a number of conflicts that are not in the focus of the Security Council. We need a more systematic outreach to these regional organizations. No conflict in the world should escape the attention of the United Nations, whether or not it is on the Security Council's agenda.

From this perspective, we are delighted that the General Assembly, despite opposition from some Member States, agreed to include in the agenda of this session a new item, item 27, proposed by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova —

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GUAM: "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development". These unresolved conflicts continue to impact negatively on the political, social and economic development of the GUAM States and the millions of people living in the region. We believe that bringing the matter to the international community through the General Assembly will facilitate the resolution of conflicts in Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, and will not, as some fear, undermine the existing mechanisms to negotiate settlement of these conflicts. In this context, I should like to express on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Moldova deep gratitude to those countries that have supported our initiative.

The Transdniestrian conflict is first and foremost a product of geopolitical interests and designs. It was unleashed with external support immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence and sovereignty by the Republic of Moldova. Unlike other internal conflicts generated and fostered by ethnic and religious antagonisms, it has a purely political character. The similarity of the ethnic structure of the population on both sides of the Dniestr river speaks for itself in this regard and cannot be denied.

Over the years the Moldovan authorities have put in place specific policies aimed at ensuring full respect for the human rights of ethnic minorities, in accordance with the highest international standards. International organizations dealing with human rights issues have repeatedly attested that in the Republic of Moldova all the conditions for the preservation of the cultural and linguistic identities of ethnic minorities have been created. These conditions include the functioning of many schools based on the languages of minorities, as well as the broad use of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication.

The satisfactory resolution of the Gagauz issue by granting special status to the region concerned is one of the greatest achievements of Moldova's national policy. It offers a unique example in post-cold-war Europe of an internal conflict settled successfully by political means. These developments, against the backdrop of the lack of democracy and growing criticism by the international community of the totalitarian Transdniestrian regime of Tiraspol, have convinced the separatist leaders to cease the political exploitation of cultural and linguistic factors within the negotiation process.

It should be emphasized here that the territory controlled by the separatists is one of the few regions of its kind in the world, one where political parties and non-governmental organizations opposed to the separatist regime are prohibited; where freedom of the mass media and of opinion is non-existent; and where other fundamental freedoms, especially those of the native Moldovan population, are systematically violated.

Moreover, various types of conventional weapons, including those prohibited or restricted by the relevant international arms control regimes, continue to be manufactured illegally in the region. The process of military build-up in Transdniestria is conducted vigorously by the separatist leaders, despite steady efforts by Moldova to reduce its military forces and to settle the political conflict exclusively through peaceful means, without giving up its status of permanent neutrality.

The Moldovan authorities are determined to find a political solution to the Transdniestrian conflict based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. This regional security problem should be resolved through negotiations, with the participation of key actors in the "5+2" format. The end goal of negotiations should be the drafting of a special legal status for the Transdniestrian region within the Republic of Moldova. The region's democratization and demilitarization are indispensable conditions for progress in the settlement process.

We have a sound road map for settling the conflict, the Ukrainian plan, together with the documents approved by the Moldovan Parliament in the summer of 2005. It is important that the negotiations resume as soon as possible, without any preconditions. The calls for such negotiations are strongly supported by the Republic of Moldova. Although little progress was achieved in the four rounds of the "5+2" negotiations, we believe it is crucial to hold talks rather than to preserve the status quo.

With a view to advancing the settlement process, the Moldovan authorities have taken a number of complementary actions. Thus, on 22 July 2005, the Moldovan Parliament adopted the Law on Fundamental Regulations of the Special Legal Status of Settlements

on the Left Bank of the River Nistru. This law grants Transdniestria the right to solve, independently, problems related to legal, social and economic development, while complying with the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the law grants the Transdniestrian region the right to have its own legislative and executive bodies, as well as more official languages.

In the same vein, conditions have been created to bring the activities of Transdniestrian companies within the legal framework of the country through their registration with the relevant constitutional authorities, which should allow those companies to benefit fully from the trade preferences Moldova has with its partners, including the European Union. That has been possible due to a joint commitment of the Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities to secure our common border. The deployment on the ground of the European Union Border Assistance Mission facilitated cooperation between the relevant Moldovan and Ukrainian services aimed at establishing a single customs regime and efficiently controlling the frontier. We are confident that this trilateral interaction will contribute to settling the Transdniestrian problem.

We take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that on 17 September the separatist Transdniestrian regime held a so-called referendum on the region's future. We condemn this pseudo-referendum, which flagrantly infringes the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, undermines the country's territorial integrity and defies democratic values and standards. The Republic of Moldova is grateful to the mediators and observers of the negotiation process — the European Union, the United States of America, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Ukraine — for their resolute position on non-recognition of that farce.

We continue to be concerned about the tensions in the security zone. The inefficiency of the current peacekeeping mechanism dictates the need for its transformation into a multinational peacekeeping mission with an international mandate. We welcome certain proposals made in this sense, and are ready to tackle this issue, in a result-oriented manner, without delay. With regard to the military aspect, I should reiterate our concern and deep regret that the Russian Federation has not yet fulfilled its Istanbul commitments. The complete implementation of these decisions will facilitate the process for the entering into force of the adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. We also underline the need for an early international inspection of depots with ammunition in the Transdniestrian region. Monitoring of the military-industrial enterprises in the eastern region of the Republic of Moldova is long overdue.

This year the Republic of Moldova celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of its independence. During these 15 years, as a Member State of the United Nations, we have fully shared the common values, responsibilities, achievements and setbacks of the Organization. Nevertheless, we laid the foundations for a democratic society where basic human rights and the rights of national minorities are fully respected. The main achievement has been the consolidation of the Republic of Moldova as a peace-loving, independent European country. The Republic of Moldova has irreversibly chosen the way of European integration as a strategic objective of its foreign policy. We are fully committed to the idea of integrating into the system of political, economic and social values of the European Union's family. We hope that the successful implementation of the European Union-Moldova Action Plan will open up for us the possibility of elevating contractual relations with the European Union to a new level.

In conclusion, I voice our hope that the proceedings of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session will be conducted in a spirit of solidarity and with a realistic and constructive approach to the complex issues confronting the world today. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova is committed to contributing, alongside other Member States, to the fulfilment of the lofty goals of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mamady Condé, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea.

Mr. Condé (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure to extend to you, Madam President, the warmest congratulations of my delegation on your election to the presidency of the sixty-first session. In giving you their trust as the third woman to preside over the General Assembly, the Member States wished to recognize your talents as a skilled diplomat and to pay tribute to the important contribution of your country to achieving our noble ideals of freedom, peace and prosperity in the world. My country, which shares common values with yours, wishes you every

success in fulfilling your mandate. I should also like to commend the remarkable work done by your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, who steered the work of the sixtieth session with great wisdom and effectiveness.

Another very pleasant duty is to convey to a valuable son of Africa, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the highest appreciation of His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic, for his eminent contribution to promoting the fundamental values of the United Nations. At this time, when he is getting ready to pass on the torch, I should like to express to him our deepest gratitude.

Guinea also welcomes the admission of Montenegro to the great family of the United Nations.

In September 2005 the General Assembly adopted, as the outcome of a high-level meeting, important decisions which are a road map for implementing the Millennium Development Goals and for reforming the Organization to adapt it to a changing world. My delegation is pleased with the reforms begun and the progress achieved. We welcome the establishment of the Human Rights Council, an appropriate tool to promote basic rights as well as good national and international governance. Likewise, we hope that the new Peacebuilding Commission will make an important contribution to mobilizing the necessary resources to help countries emerging from conflict.

However, six decades after the creation of the United Nations, consistent action by the Organization in terms of development, humanitarian aid and the environment is still an unfinished work. The reform of the Secretariat's management, which implies individual and collective sacrifices, aims not only at reducing the costs of the United Nations, but also at better investment in order to enhance its effectiveness. To move forward, the international community must consolidate the reforms and extend them to the principal organs of the Organization. Guinea firmly supports this dynamic, which is the only thing that can ensure the transparency, representativeness and effectiveness of its bodies. This process depends, of course, on the political will of all its Member States, without exception.

In the maintenance of international peace and security we see reasons for both satisfaction and concern.

In Africa, and in particular the western part, my delegation is happy that peace has been restored to Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia. However, the balance in these States is still precarious. We therefore urge the international community to strengthen its cooperation with their democratically elected Governments in order to strengthen peace and to ensure the rapid recovery of their economies.

In Côte d'Ivoire the peace process is entering a decisive phase, with the settlement of sensitive issues related to the holding of upcoming free and fair elections. Guinea encourages the parties to fully cooperate in continued dialogue with a view to a successful outcome to the crisis.

The significant progress made in the Great Lakes region in recent months is encouraging.

The general elections held on 30 July in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are a crucial stage in the peace process. But keeping troops of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) there, in support of Government efforts, is still crucial to restoring State authority over the entire national territory and, in particular, to bringing peace to the eastern part of the country.

In Sudan, we greatly appreciate the efforts of the international community, particularly the African Union and regional leaders, to promote peace and security in Darfur. The Abuja Peace Accord of May 2006 is a stepping stone towards the inclusive, comprehensive agreement that is crucial to that country's stability.

In Somalia, my delegation encourages all the parties concerned to favour the path of negotiation with a view to restoring peace.

With regard to the Western Sahara, the Republic of Guinea encourages the parties in conflict to strengthen their cooperation with the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy in order to find a political solution that is fair, lasting and mutually acceptable.

In the Middle East, Guinea regrets the fact that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza was not followed by additional measures to put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territory. It calls upon the parties to uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as the Quartet road map for the creation of two States, Palestinian and Israeli, with secure, internationally recognized borders, living side by side in peace.

With respect to the Israeli-Lebanese crisis, Guinea greatly regrets the tragedy of the Lebanese people. We support effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which imposes a ceasefire and the deployment of a stronger international force in southern Lebanon.

We stress the need to end the escalating violence in Iraq, in order to guarantee the country's stability and successfully carry out national reconstruction.

In Asia, the Government of Guinea reaffirms its attachment to the one-China principle. We also attach great importance to the peaceful reunification of Korea, and the continuation of efforts to preserve peace, security and stability in the Korean peninsula.

The recommendations of the Working Group on peacekeeping operations are a reference point for taking up the challenges of peace. We welcome the greater cooperation between the Secretariat and the troop-contributing countries, which has made it possible to better understand what is at stake, thus favouring an increased contribution from Member States. The Republic of Guinea regularly takes part in peacekeeping operations, and we reaffirm our readiness to enhance our contribution within the framework of the new agreements and arrangements that will stem from the reform process.

Guinea strongly condemns all forms and manifestations of terrorism, the scourge threatening international peace and security. We value the crucial role played by the United Nations in fighting it, and therefore support the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted at the sixtieth session of the General Assembly.

In the area of disarmament, Guinea condemns the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are two inseparable parts of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and bind all parties, without exception.

The failure last July of the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects should not in the least undermine our commitment to combat the proliferation of such weapons and the illicit trade in them. My country is in favour of establishing an international, legally binding instrument dealing with all the related issues. In this respect, the transformation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Moratorium into a Convention on small arms reflects the determination of our States to eradicate this other scourge. Its success will depend upon the level of cooperation of member States and also the commitment of its partners.

The 2005 Summit was a decisive step in promoting the Millennium Development Goals. Guinea has made an effort to put in place more ambitious national development strategies. In this context, the Government has drafted a national poverty reduction strategy based on speeding up economic growth and access to basic social services, as well as improving governance. In order to implement this policy, the Government and its development partners have begun programmes and projects dealing with priority sectors, such as education, health, integrated rural development, infrastructure, the provision of water, and strengthening human and institutional capacities.

In the same spirit, the drafting in February 2005 of the second follow-up report on the Millennium Development Goal made it possible to assess the progress made, note the shortcomings and outline the prospects of achieving the Goals by 2015. We regard this as an opportunity to urge our development partners to swiftly implement the entire set of internationally recognized development initiatives, including the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

We reaffirm the urgent need to strengthen official development assistance and to assure the long-term viability of debt by cancelling all public and bilateral debt of the most heavily indebted poor countries. While condemning the impasse in negotiations of the World Trade Organization's Doha Round, my delegation calls upon Member States to make a collective effort to prevent a return to protectionism, a factor in the deregulation of international economic relations.

Guinea took part with great interest in the High-Level Dialogue that the General Assembly has just devoted to the question of international migration and development. We reiterate our conviction that continuation of this Dialogue within the framework of the global consultative forum will help to identify ways and means to better exploit the benefits of migration for development, while mitigating its harmful effects.

Although Guinea is not a country in conflict or emerging from conflict, the midterm review of the humanitarian appeal, "Guinea 2006", points out, "Today its social indicators have become similar to those of countries emerging from a prolonged war." That confirms the very serious consequences of the subregional instability that we have seen for more than 15 years in my country. In this respect, our Government, through me, wishes to reiterate its appeal for greater assistance in order to help the affected regions to recover. We welcome the transformation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund into the Central Emergency Response Fund. We hope that within the common country programming process and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, covering the period 2007-2011, the funding gaps apparent in the course of various humanitarian appeals will be filled and better provisions for Guinea will be considered.

Furthermore, deeply concerned by child trafficking, Guinea has signed with Mali and Côte d'Ivoire a memorandum of understanding to prevent this phenomenon and to improve border control.

In our common quest for a new international order, this sixty-first session of the General Assembly will be seen as one of important change for the United Nations. The reforms that we have achieved will be the beacons illuminating the path to a lasting peace and development with greater solidarity. But we must also maintain the impetus of reform and continue in our common will to make the United Nations the irreplaceable instrument to take up the enormous challenges of peace, security, development and human rights in the twenty-first century.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Dermot Ahern, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland.

Mr. Ahern (Ireland): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on your appointment and assuring you of Ireland's full support for the coming year.

This session of the General Assembly is the last under the stewardship of Secretary-General Annan. I salute his achievements and pay tribute to his leadership. He has carried out his heavy responsibilities with wisdom and dignity. He can step down from office fully satisfied with the service he has given to the peoples of the United Nations. I was proud last year to act as one of his envoys in the vital reform agenda that he pioneered.

Since the 2005 World Summit significant progress has been made. The Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council have been established. But there is more to be done. Management reform is essential to revitalizing the Organization and ensuring that the Secretariat can focus on the priorities we all share. It is in the interest of us all — developed and developing countries alike — for it to succeed.

The continuing stalemate over the reform of the Security Council leaves it insufficiently representative of the world as it now is. That serves those who for their own reasons would challenge its legitimacy. This situation cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely, so I welcome recent efforts to restart negotiations on possible options likely to win widespread support.

The true test of the United Nations is, however, not the efficiency of its structures, but the effectiveness of its actions. As the Secretary-General said last week, three key challenges face the world: first, achieving sustainable development and the elimination of poverty and disease; secondly, the promotion of universal human rights and the rule of law; and, thirdly, ensuring security, the prevention of conflict and the ending of war.

In setting our own national aid target of meeting the goal of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2012, three years ahead of the European Union schedule, Ireland has put the Millennium Development Goals at the heart of its aid programme, with a special focus on Africa, poverty reduction, tackling hunger, and HIV/AIDS. Last week we published a White Paper which sets out clearly and in detail how we aim to achieve our development objectives. Sustainable development must include addressing the immense global threat of climate change. Development is also the key to addressing the enormous challenges posed by migration.

Ireland is deeply committed to Africa. Despite its huge problems, there are encouraging signs. We are inspired by the efforts to shape new institutions and more cohesive societies in the aftermath of conflicts and cruelties in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ireland is honoured to assist these and other countries through their difficult transitions, including through aid and the presence of our troops in the United Nations

Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). We particularly support the efforts of the African Union to bring peace and prosperity to Africa, helping to place Africans firmly in control of their own destiny.

However, not all of our collective efforts have met with success. The suffering of the people of Darfur shames the world. There has been human tragedy there on a massive scale, with the intimidation, rape and murder of hundreds of thousands of innocents and the displacement of vast numbers from their homes. Just two months ago I visited a displacement camp myself, in Aboushouk in Darfur. I have seen how precarious the lives of the people are there and also their determination to return home to a better future for themselves and their children.

The people of Darfur have three essential needs. First, humanitarian aid must be delivered safely and without restrictions. Secondly, there must be an international peacekeeping force with a robust mandate. As set out by the Security Council, it should be a well-equipped and substantial United Nations force. I again appeal strongly to the Sudanese Government to agree to the deployment of such a force, and to all those with influence on it to persuade it so to do. I cannot emphasize enough the urgency of this. Pending the arrival of a United Nations force, the African Union force — whose continuation I welcome — should have the resources necessary to play a more effective role. Thirdly, long-term security can only be guaranteed by the full implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement.

Last year the World Summit defined the international community's responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity should national authorities fail to do so. It would be a disgrace if this major advance became an exercise in empty rhetoric. The Government of Sudan has fundamental responsibility for the safety of its own people. The international community must find ways to persuade it to live up to that responsibility, if need be including further measures against it. We cannot indefinitely stand by and watch with horror from the sidelines.

There can be no lasting development or security without full respect for human rights. The human rights of the most vulnerable are especially important. I strongly welcome the recent conclusion of negotiations on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Human Rights Council must, in developing its new ways of working, build on the achievements of its predecessor. It must demonstrate that it can provide strong leadership, particularly in dealing effectively with grave human rights abuses. The human rights situation in Burma/Myanmar remains particularly grave. I again call on the regime to move towards democracy and to release all political prisoners, in particular Aung San Suu Kyi.

The centrality of the United Nations to international peace and security is once again underlined by the issues dominating the debate in the Assembly. The question is not whether the United Nations is relevant, but, rather, whether it can respond effectively to all the situations which clamour for its attention. The Peacebuilding Commission adds an important new dimension. It must be properly resourced, and Ireland is pleased to be contributing €10 million to that fund.

The single greatest challenge to international peace and security is the situation in the Middle East. The dreadful events of recent months have again brought before the eyes of the world the continuing suffering being borne by the peoples of the region. Frustration at the long agony of the Palestinian people creates and sharpens wider divisions across the world. A comprehensive settlement of the interrelated problems of the region is more urgently required than at any time in the past 60 years.

In Lebanon there are signs of hope, but there is no room for complacency. Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) offers a path to a stable peace, and good progress is being made in its implementation. European countries in particular have responded well to the call for contributions to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) II. Ireland will very shortly be in a position to offer its own contribution to that force.

But the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians will continue to generate surges of conflict across the region until it is resolved. Any illusion that there can be a unilateral or a military solution has surely been shattered. This is a conflict about the sharing of space. The only solution lies in a negotiated outcome. It is time for a major international effort to launch serious negotiations for a settlement — the establishment of two sovereign democratic States living together in peace and security.

But to achieve peace there must be partners for peace. Ireland strongly supports the continuing efforts of President Abbas to create a national unity government committed to the peace process and reflecting the Quartet principles. If he succeeds the international community must be generous and creative in response. Israel's absolute right to exist in peace and security should be unchallenged. But, not least in its own interests, Israel must engage seriously and openly with the Palestinians. It must cease all activities, in particular the expansion of settlements, which are against international law and which make a lasting peace harder to attain.

Ireland shares the Secretary-General's continuing outrage at the failure of last year's Summit to make any reference to nuclear disarmament. It is simply folly to let this issue languish. In the next review of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons we must do better. Ireland will work with like-minded partners to keep this issue on the agenda. Dr. Hans Blix has already offered us a range of fresh and practical ideas from which we can draw. The world is right to insist on nuclear non-proliferation, but progress on disarmament would make that insistence still more compelling. Ireland, with its European partners, wants to see a diplomatic solution to the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, and we call on Iran to respond positively and rapidly to the wide-ranging proposals that have been put to it. We equally support efforts to renew the six-party talks on North Korea.

The world must also act to reduce the supply of small arms and light weapons, which facilitate the escalation of local tensions into all-out conflicts. Ireland strongly supports the negotiation of an arms trade treaty. The disturbing reports from Lebanon also highlight the need for further restrictions on the use of cluster bombs.

On behalf of my Government, I pay particular tribute to Prime Minister Blair for his commitment and dedication to the peace process in Northern Ireland. He and my Prime Minister, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, have devoted almost 10 years to driving it forward. Credit is also due to the parties in Northern Ireland, who, despite deep and abiding divisions reaching far back into our history, are committed to addressing those divisions purely within the political arena.

In Northern Ireland the word has finally replaced the weapon as the way to resolve disputes. The Northern Ireland peace process is now at an important juncture. We have worked hard to implement the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, but its capstone, a sustained power-sharing government, has for far too long proved elusive. The British and Irish Governments are demanding that the political parties there agree by 24 November this year to form such a government. That deadline is real, reflecting our shared belief that drift and uncertainty on the political front are not in the interests of peace and reconciliation, and cannot be sustained.

If the parties fail to agree, both Governments will deepen their cooperation to deliver improvements in peoples' daily lives. But that is not our preferred option. We want local politicians in Northern Ireland taking responsibility for the issues that concern their people. The conditions for a power-sharing government have never been more favourable. It is what the people want. Inevitably it will happen some time. But if it does not happen in November the opportunity may not come again for a considerable time.

The great Irish writer George Bernard Shaw once said that making war was hard, but that making peace was infinitely more arduous. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution are ultimately about psychology — addressing fears, perceptions and beliefs about the past and about the future. A conflict does not begin when the trigger is pulled; it begins in the heart and mind of the person who pulls that trigger. We have learned this at first hand in Ireland. We know the pain and difficulty of dealing with the legacy of division. But over the years we have learned some things about building peace, encouraging reconciliation, improving human rights and the rule of law and addressing social and economic alienation.

Our own national experience reinforces what we have learned at the United Nations and from our development programme. That is why we have just established in Ireland an Irish Conflict Analysis and Resolution Support Unit. It will seek to harness our experience and help to share it. It will work closely with the Peacebuilding Commission. We do not overestimate what we can do, nor do we underestimate the difficulty of peacebuilding, but I genuinely believe that our track record means that we can bring something distinctive to the table. I would encourage all countries represented here to find ways of sharing their own experience and exchanging and enhancing

our collective knowledge of how to prevent and resolve conflict.

Since the establishment of the United Nations the world has been spared a repeat of the catastrophic global conflicts that made the first half of the twentieth century the bloodiest era in human history. But the challenges ahead of us remain grave and pressing. When we met here last year we agreed an ambitious agenda for the twenty-first century. We have made progress since then, but there is still so much to do. We must now focus on making our ambitions real.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdallah, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia.

Mr. Abdallah (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, on the occasion of your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, I am pleased to convey to you and to our brotherly country Bahrain my most sincere congratulations. We are convinced that your experience and competence will enrich the work of this session and will contribute to its success.

I should also like to take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his constant efforts to implement the recommendations of the 2005 Summit related to the reform of the Organization and the adoption of the two resolutions creating the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.

I take this opportunity to convey my special thanks to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for the valuable efforts he has been tirelessly making to enhance the Organization's role and advance its performance, and for proving his capability to realize a consensus on several complex issues and to advance the reform of the Organization.

We note with satisfaction the important steps achieved since the 2005 Summit aimed at developing the Organization's role and work for the sake of further efficiency in its action, which will contribute to anchoring the values of justice and moderation in international relations. While insisting on the need to confer more transparency on the Security Council and pursue efforts to reach consensus on its enlargement, which will ensure equitable representation of all international parties and allow the Council to perform its main functions in an environment of dialogue and consensus, we also call for strengthening the General Assembly's prerogatives, revitalizing its role, and making it work more efficiently.

Tunisia, which had the honour of being among the first members of the Human Rights Council, reiterates its determination to participate actively in the work of this new United Nations institution and to contribute to achieving the noble objectives for which it was created, especially those related to respect for human rights in their global meaning, as agreed at the international level.

Our world today sees numerous rapid changes and developments in security, political, economic and social issues while time many international issues remain unresolved. Tunisia — which has supported the Middle East peace process since its inception and has always called for dialogue, negotiation and recourse to international legality — stresses again the need to find a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict that will allow all the peoples of the region to live in peace and security. Taking into account the hardships and suffering that the fraternal Palestinian people are undergoing, such as the siege, Tunisia calls upon the international community to provide them with international protection urgently. Tunisia also renews its call for active parties, primarily the Quartet, to ensure appropriate conditions for reviving all tracks of the peace process in accordance with ongoing Arab efforts, to help the Palestinian people regain their legitimate national rights, including the establishment of their independent State and to allow sister States Syria and Lebanon to recover their occupied territories.

Tunisia reiterates its solidarity with Lebanon following the Israeli aggression, which caused destruction and huge loss of life and property, and renews its call on the international community to contribute to the reconstruction of Lebanon. In this regard, Tunisia commends the results of the recent Stockholm donor summit.

Tunisia also expresses the hope that the fraternal Iraqi people will find appropriate solutions to their national causes in the framework of the political process, in order to maintain national unity and guarantee security and stability, which will allow Iraqis to devote themselves to reconstruction.

To face the challenges on the international scene, especially the phenomenon of extremism and terrorism,

the international community must enhance its efforts and cooperation. Tunisia, which was among the first to warn against these dangers, renews its call for an international conference, under United Nations auspices, to elaborate an international code of conduct to combat terrorism to which all parties would be committed. Tunisia has also called for tackling all root causes of terrorism — mainly injustice, the policy of double standards, and economic and social conditions that generate frustration and marginalization — within the framework of a comprehensive approach.

To implement this approach, the international community adopted the Tunisian initiative to set up a world solidarity fund to fight poverty and exclusion and to lay the foundations for a more equitable and solidarity-based vision for development. We hope that all relevant parties will increase their efforts to provide the necessary financing to operate this mechanism.

Spreading the culture of tolerance, dialogue and respect for beliefs and religious symbols in all countries has today become one of the urgent necessities for reinforcing rapprochement, understanding and solidarity among peoples and for establishing constructive international relations based on moderation and respect for the specificities and civilizations of peoples and on rejection of violence, extremism and intolerance.

In this regard, and based on its firm belief in those principles, Tunisia proposed several initiatives, such as the adoption of the Carthage Charter for Tolerance in 1995, the appeal of His Excellency the President of the Republic, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, for a pedagogy of tolerance, the proclamation of the 2001 Tunis Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations, and the establishment of the Ben Ali Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions.

In spite of all the efforts made, achieving the Millennium Development Goals faces difficulties that require more collective efforts by all components of the international community, especially economically strong and developed countries, in the field of financing the development of the countries of the South and speeding up the transfer of technology to them. With regard to efforts to reinforce resources for developing countries, Tunisia again appeals for further action to relieve the debt burden of the least developed countries and to recycle those of middle-income countries by transforming them into investments in development projects considered to be a priority by those countries.

Convinced that the digital divide is one of the main challenges to development, Tunisia initiated the call for a world summit on the information society under the auspices of the United Nations. In November 2005 it was honoured to host the second phase of this summit, which produced important results and laid the foundations for a new world vision aimed at reducing the digital divide between countries and establishing the bases of a society of knowledge by adopting the Tunis Agenda and the Tunis Commitment. We are confident that the results of that summit will benefit from appropriate consideration and follow-up by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as will all stakeholders in information technology and communication.

Tunisia has directed all its capabilities to elevating itself to the level of an advanced country within a future-oriented vision, the foundations of which were laid by President Ben Ali. That vision includes all political, economic, social and developmental domains. It materialized in a set of deep reforms that led to the reinforcement of democracy, promotion of a culture of human rights at both conceptual and concrete levels, consecration of public freedoms, and participation of all segments of Tunisian society in the political life of the country, all in the framework of the rule of law and the institutions of the State. Furthermore, Tunisia's economic and social achievements allowed it to attain a high rank among the group of countries with the highest human development index. That was appreciated by international financial institutions and specialized United Nations agencies. Tunisia pursues this process of reform and achievement with determination and perseverance.

Within its Maghreb, Arab and Mediterranean environment, Tunisia endeavours to strengthen relations of cooperation, solidarity, dialogue and consultation among all parties in order to reinforce security and stability, achieve the aspirations of the peoples of the region for an integral development and encourage economic complementarity. For Tunisia, the establishment of the Arab Maghreb remains a strategic choice and in terms of civilization, a gain for peoples of the region, laying the foundations for increased integration and complementarity among the Maghreb countries. Tunisia works alongside its sister States of

the region to further revitalize the march of the union in the interest of its peoples.

Our country is also keen to enhance its strong relationship with the European Union and to develop it towards the establishment of a solidarity-based partnership, which we hope will advance in a context of mutual respect and dialogue, thus serving the interests of all parties.

Tunisia, as part of the African continent, relentlessly continues to support the efforts of the African Union to finalize the establishment of its institutions and reinvigorate them, as well as to enhance its role in achieving solidarity-based development, security and stability throughout the continent. In this regard Tunisia has actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations, especially in Africa, convinced, as always, of the necessity to join international efforts to strengthen the foundations of peace and security throughout the world.

Although we believe that the future of the continent remains in the hands of Africans and that development can be achieved primarily by relying on their own capabilities, Africa needs more support and assistance from the international community to enable it to face the challenges and achieve the aspirations of its peoples.

The strong relationship and interaction among peace, security, development and social stability in today's world confirm the need for all nations to join multilateral efforts on the basis of the values of dialogue, consensus and solidarity. That will help in finding the appropriate solutions to the challenges posed. We believe that the United Nations remains the ideal forum to deal with these urgent issues based on the values and principles of its Charter.

The President: I now call on His Excellency the Honourable Petrus Compton, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia.

Mr. Compton (Saint Lucia): At the outset permit me to congratulate you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, and to express Saint Lucia's appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson of Sweden, for the excellent manner in which he spearheaded the work of the sixtieth session. We wish also to express our profound respect and gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his great vision, committed leadership and tireless efforts in promoting the noble ideals and values of our United Nations under the most difficult circumstances. We wish him and his family well in their future endeavours.

When in September 2000 we took the unprecedented step of pledging to meet eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015, it represented a belated admission that the development of every nation is a collective responsibility.

At that Summit we recognized that it was an affront to our basic humanity that so many people on our planet continued to live in conditions of abject poverty and deprivation; that so many continued to suffer the ravages of disease and war; and that basic necessities of life, taken for granted by most of us, remained unattainable by so many. We also recognized that unless we developed appropriate partnerships to deal with these problems they would persist, to our collective shame.

At this, our sixty-first session, we reaffirm our commitment to this notion of partnership as a significant modality for the attainment of our common goals. Saint Lucia is satisfied that the idea of partnership accommodates the spirit of multilateralism, which is the defining principle of our relationship within the United Nations. This multilateralist spirit must constantly be safeguarded and fortified, and that can only be accomplished by a strong and confident United Nations.

Saint Lucia takes this opportunity to once again express its determined support for the programmes of reform of the United Nations, designed as these are to create the capacity and conditions for the exercise of a strong central role by the United Nations within the international community. We salute the achievements to date, namely, the replacement of the moribund Human Rights Commission with the new Human Rights Council and the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. We recognize that these bodies are far from perfect and will require continued attention by Member States. However, they reflect our determination to translate talk into action. Saint Lucia looks forward to continuing the discussions on the remaining items on our reform agenda — in particular, Security Council reform, strengthening and refocusing

the General Assembly, the empowerment of the Economic and Social Council and management reform.

Saint Lucia continues to believe in the wisdom of the words of our Secretary-General, who, in his March 2005 report "In Larger Freedom", opined:

> "we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed." (*A/59/2005, para. 17*)

As we seek to develop partnerships for development, utilizing the Millennium Development Goals as the benchmark, Saint Lucia has been moving steadily towards the attainment of some of the goals. Universal primary education has been largely attained, and we have gone further to introduce a programme of universal access to free secondary education for our young citizens. Saint Lucia is in the process of establishing a universal programme of free health care, and it has made significant progress in the area of maternal and child health. We are also working steadfastly in the battle against HIV/AIDS through education, early detection and treatment programmes, and also through the provision of free or subsidized antiretroviral drugs.

All these efforts have been bolstered in a practical demonstration of South-South cooperation through generous support and assistance from a number of developing countries in the areas of human resource development in the health sector and the construction of new health facilities. South-South partnerships are workable. We need to continue to develop and widen them for the betterment of developing countries.

Saint Lucia applauds the return of Haiti to democratic governance. This long-awaited development has led to the readmission of that country to the councils of the Caribbean Community. We recognize that the road to normalcy in Haiti will be a long and tortuous one, requiring a sustained political focus by the international community. Saint Lucia calls for the speedy release of development resources promised to that country in order that its Government and people may tackle in a meaningful way the numerous obstacles standing in its development path.

Saint Lucia also welcomes the Final Document of the Fourteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana. This historic meeting addressed a wide range of regional and international issues, including the sanctity of international law, the promotion and preservation of multilateralism, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the right to self-determination and decolonization. The Final Document provides the international community with a workable road map for the development agenda far into this new century, with achievable solutions to many of the issues facing us today.

Saint Lucia notes and welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of the 2005 International Conference on Financing for Development (A/61/253). We call upon the developed countries represented at that forum to honour the commitments made there and at previous United Nations summits and conferences on trade, debt and finance, especially their promise to fulfil the goal of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product going to official development assistance. We believe it is imperative that the international community increase its efforts to address the indebtedness of poor developing countries. It is also important that these countries address the systemic deficiencies in the global economic and financial system. These deficiencies all constitute serious threats to the survival of developing countries like Saint Lucia.

Small island developing States, such as those in the Caribbean, the Pacific and Indian oceans and the Mediterranean, are extremely vulnerable to the impact of climate change. We have already reached a dangerous level of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and urgent action is required to reverse this situation.

In this connection, the international community, in particular our developed partners, needs to take more aggressive action to promote the development and distribution of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies in developed and developing countries alike. To assist developing countries to play their part in this connection there is a need to establish a global renewable energy and energy efficiency fund. Saint Lucia joins with its colleague members of the Alliance of Small Island States, and with other affected States, in calling for the international community to

address the issues of sea-level rise and climate change as a matter of urgency.

The international community must honour its responsibility for, and commitment to, the full implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We insist on the urgent and proper mainstreaming of the Strategy into the respective work programmes of the United Nations agencies and other bodies. Those who are the largest producers of greenhouse gases must bear responsibility for the damage they are causing to the global environment. From our own regional perspective, Saint Lucia welcomes the adoption of measures for the promotion of an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development. We welcome initiatives taken to this end by the Association of Caribbean States and the Caribbean Community.

Half a decade into the twenty-first century there are still some 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories under the review of the General Assembly. Most are small island territories in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. Their decolonization through a genuine process of self-determination is the unfinished agenda of the United Nations. In this connection, Article 73b of the Charter, on the necessity of promoting genuine self-government, should be respected. We call on the administering Powers to increase their level of cooperation with the Special Committee on Decolonization, and call on the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the development of their capacity for self-government and in furtherance of their process of self-determination.

The year 2007 will mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, which began the process of the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. A number of international events are planned throughout the globe to honour the memory of the millions who died during the middle passage, and those who subsequently perished under the horrors of chattel slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas. Saint Lucia joins with the countries of the African diaspora in the Caribbean, and with other like-minded countries, in supporting a United Nations commemoration in 2007 of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

I could not end without referring to the serious impact of the rulings of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in respect of banana exports to our preferential markets in Europe. Few in the developed world can appreciate the mass social dislocation that this decision has caused, with thousands of independent farmers, employers in their own right, left without a livelihood through no fault of their own.

Consider that for every banana farmer in Saint Lucia who has lost his or her livelihood at least six persons have also been excised from direct participation in the economic system. The WTO has become synonymous with pain and suffering for farmers in Saint Lucia. In many instances the implementation of some of the obligations has created more hardship and poverty than previously existed. Accordingly, while economic and trade policy reform in principle holds much promise for small developing countries, the international community must come to grips with the fact that the one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate and impractical. In this connection, a set of trading rules flexible enough to take into account the concerns of small States must be enacted. The principle of special and differential treatment must infuse all aspects of the new trade rules that we seek to create.

There is much unfinished business ahead of us. It is our expectation that the members of the Assembly will focus even more intently on the development of appropriate strategies for its resolution. We are confident that under your guidance and leadership, Madam President, the development agenda of the Organization will be advanced further. For its part, Saint Lucia remains committed to the ideals of multilateralism, and reaffirms its view that the United Nations offers the best opportunity for the achievement of peace, security and sustainable development for all.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs Valgerdur Sverrisdottir, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland.

Mrs. Sverrisdottir (Iceland): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I am especially pleased to see a woman in this important position after a break of nearly 30 years. I join those who have expressed thanks to the Secretary-General for his leadership and commitment in recent years in addressing the very serious challenges facing the international community.

Allow me also to take this opportunity to congratulate the Republic of Montenegro on its accession to membership of the United Nations.

The commitment to global partnership for development is a timely, yet sobering, theme in light of the long road we have still to travel and the setbacks already encountered. A major setback has been the crisis in global trade talks. Trade can be the single most important vehicle for global development, and we should not let the opportunity presented to us by the Doha Development Agenda slip from our grasp. We must ensure that gains from trade liberalization benefit the poor and are fairly distributed. Iceland remains strongly committed to the Agenda.

Many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, have little chance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the target date, unless significant additional resources are made available. We welcome and support international efforts for debt relief to the poorest countries. We also applaud those countries that have committed to increasing official development assistance. Iceland is also shouldering its responsibility. Over the next three years Iceland's development assistance will have almost tripled in size, and we are determined to do even more. Beyond 2009 our assistance should increase even further, with the ambition of reaching the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income.

The global partnership rests on the principles of transparency, accountability, good governance, equity and commitment to poverty reduction. Iceland also attaches special importance to the rights of women and children. As the Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi, so rightly pointed out in her Nobel Peace Prize Lecture on 10 December 2003,

> "To disregard women and bar them from active participation in political, social, economic and cultural life would in fact be tantamount to depriving the entire population of every society of half its capability."

We want to see more determined efforts by development partners and United Nations agencies to pursue gender equality. The work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) must be given more weight within the United Nations. Iceland has increased its support for the work of UNIFEM more than tenfold over the past two years, and we will increase our support even further.

The mission statement of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) correctly insists that the survival, protection and development of children are central to human progress. Nobody questions this statement, yet more than 10 million children die from preventable causes every year. Iceland will further increase its contributions to the vital work of UNICEF. I am proud to say that the people of Iceland have been particularly active and make the highest contribution per capita of national societies to UNICEF.

At least half of the eight Millennium Development Goals relate to resource use and environmental conservation, that is, to sustainable development. We will not be able to eradicate extreme poverty or hunger if we cannot safeguard the environment, the basis of food security around the world. We cannot hope to reduce child mortality unless we deal with the contamination of fresh water. There is a close relationship between the health of the earth's ecosystem and human welfare, security and peace. Icelanders base their livelihood on the living resources of the sea and abundant renewable energy. Iceland rose from relatively recent poverty to affluence through the application of technological innovations and by drawing on international cooperation. We are convinced that our success could be replicated in many other parts of the world, given the right incentives and an enabling environment.

In this connection, I should like to refer in particular to two areas of sustainable development: ocean issues and energy issues.

Ocean issues have far-reaching development implications. Ninety-five per cent of those who make their living from fisheries are in the developing world. A billion people depend on fisheries for their main intake of protein. At the same time, we are seeing a rapid increase in pollution of the ocean and depletion of its living resources. That is why Iceland has prioritized this area in its development cooperation and in the work of the fisheries department of the United Nations University in Iceland.

Energy issues also loom large. While Icelanders enjoy the good fortune of having clean, renewable energy for 70 per cent of our total energy use, energy issues are increasingly becoming one of the main drivers of the sustainable development agenda within

the United Nations. Two billion people lack access to electricity. All eight Millennium Development Goals will require greater energy consumption.

Unfortunately, more energy consumption in most cases means greater greenhouse gas emissions. One of our greatest challenges today is to square the development circle, to meet our development needs while safeguarding the environment. One way certainly is to increase substantially the share of renewables in world energy demand. That is why Iceland is taking an active part in promoting renewables and new technologies through its development cooperation and the work of the geothermal department of the United Nations University. Another example of our commitment in this area is the international seminar on hydrogen use for the developing world, to be held in Reykjavik later this week. It will be co-hosted by Iceland and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Much has been achieved over the past 12 months in implementing the outcome of the World Summit. In this connection, I join others in expressing appreciation for the outstanding work done by Jan Eliasson as President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. We now have a Peacebuilding Commission. The new Human Rights Council has also been established. It is the duty of all of us to make sure that we strengthen its credibility and turn it into a powerful defender and reinforcer of basic human rights. Its credibility will depend to a large extent on its even-handedness.

Useful work has already been done on internal reform of the United Nations. The success of these reforms — I think in particular of the mandate review — will affect the long-term credibility of the United Nations. It is with great interest and high hopes that we await the outcome of the work of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence.

Peace and security is fundamental to implementing a global partnership for development. In the face of the crippling effects of terrorism, we welcome the agreement on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In the fight against terrorism, human rights must not be compromised; otherwise, we undermine the values that we seek to defend. Torture cannot be justified. As we have seen recently, years of careful development can be reversed almost overnight by war. Conflict prevention, restraint by the parties involved and a commitment by other actors to urge restraint, rather than encourage conflict, are also fundamental to the partnership.

Sixty years ago, on 19 November 1946, Iceland became a Member of the United Nations. Iceland has since then strongly supported the principles of the United Nations as written in the Charter. With the full support of the other Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden — Iceland decided in 1998 to present for the first time its candidature for a seat on the Security Council for the period 2009-2010, with elections to be held in 2008. This candidature, which was declared within the Western European and Others Group in April 2000, is based on our readiness to shoulder the responsibility of serving on the United Nations body charged with maintaining and strengthening peace and security. As one of the almost 100 smaller States of the United Nations, Iceland makes every endeavour to cultivate mutually beneficial relations with all Members of the Organization and believes itself to be favourably positioned to exercise with fairness and firmness the role of a Security Council member.

The task of building a global partnership for development is not easy. But it is the only way in which we can realistically address the challenges facing us, whether they be challenges of poverty, security, the environment or health. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan has put it, "the cause of larger freedom can only be advanced by broad, deep and sustained global cooperation among States". (*A/59/2005, para. 18*).

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergei Martynov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Martynov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): It is generally considered that the struggle of ideologies has passed into history together with the collapse of the bipolar world order. Yet in reality the world continues a painful quest for a system of ideas that could ensure its security, justice and prosperity. The 2005 World Summit and the current General Assembly debate are good evidence of this quest. Nowhere else but on this rostrum does one have such an acute sense that ideas and the struggle for them are no abstract matter. They permeate the flesh and blood of millions and billions of people.

I hope that many of those present will agree that free self-determination is the main ideology of the modern world. Is it not absolutely clear that as long as there is no independent Palestinian State, peacefully coexisting with all its neighbours, and that as long as Iraq is not free from occupation, then terrorism and extremism will remain inevitable and invincible? Attempts to solve the problems of self-determination by violent measures, whether military or of any other kind, from the outside will result only in increasing the ranks of the ruthless disciples of terrorism and extremism.

In the modern world free self-determination is not only an issue of State independence and sovereignty. It is also an issue of recognizing — not in word, but in deed — a diversity of ways for countries and peoples to progress. We must provide the Palestinians, Iraqis, Lebanese and other peoples with the possibility of building their own homes in the way they want. Any help should come only then and in such manner as they wish, not as deemed appropriate by the ideologues of crusades in some capitals. There are no clever and foolish, no superior and inferior, no righteous and vicious peoples and religions; there are just people of the planet who are equally eager for happiness, uncomplicated and dignified.

The five years that have passed since 11 September 2001 have proved with painful clarity that ideology and the practice of crusades do not bring peace and democracy. They lead to the devastation of States, the destruction of the fabric of life of entire nations, and the death of children, women and innocent civilians. They also result in an upsurge of terrorism, swelling the ranks of its followers and supporters. In the same way, religious intolerance and the rejection of the beliefs and conventions of other people do not bring spiritual harmony and unity. They cause an outbreak of radicalism, fanaticism and extremism. Encouragement of religious tolerance within societies should become a responsibility of political and state leaders.

International security and global stability are inseparable from the solution of the world's development problems. Security and development are inseparable. This is not some artificial linkage created in the halls of the United Nations. Its real nature has been clearly shown by the events in the suburbs of Paris. Are we, here in the General Assembly, and our colleagues in the capitals of the richest countries, waiting for an even more alarming signal? Are we waiting for the spiralling extremism caused by the lack of prospects for the future?

The situation is as clear as it can get. And it is clear that inadequate reflection of the priorities of development and development assistance in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1) was a serious mistake by the international community.

How can we correct this mistake? We can do so only by earnest and not hypocritical practical efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals. Before too long we will see new proposals based on the results of the large-scale study on raising system-wide coherence and coordination of actions of the agencies of the United Nations system in the field of development assistance. Our task is to implement these important initiatives in deed.

The Millennium Development Goals are clear. None is easily achievable. These problems are too old and too deep-rooted to be solved by incremental and shallow methods. Nobody treats a dangerous infection with aspirin. A serious task requires serious tools. That is why the time has come for deep transformation of the Bretton Woods institutions. They were established in a different era and for different purposes. They should be changed and made to serve the cause of global development. A special role in making development a success and not a problem will belong to the Economic and Social Council, as the major United Nations coordinating body on development. Special responsibility will rest on the shoulders of the members of the Council.

Belarus is a candidate for membership of the Economic and Social Council for the period 2007-2009. I appeal to Member States to support Belarus in the elections to be held during the current session. The Assembly may rest assured that the Republic of Belarus will not fall short of its expectations. As a Member of the United Nations since 1945, Belarus has never wavered in its devotion to the purposes and principles of the Charter. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement since 1998, Belarus stands actively and resolutely for the implementation of the goals and principles of the Movement and the practical strengthening of its role in international affairs.

Our responsibility and concern for the destiny of the world are sincere. There is much evidence to prove that. In its region the Republic of Belarus is a donor of

international security. Belarus was the first country in the world to voluntarily renounce the possession of the nuclear weapons it had at its disposal.

Despite all the difficulties of the transition period, our country was among the first to respond to the plight of people struck by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, and provided humanitarian assistance to the disaster-stricken countries of south-east Asia. Nor was our country an indifferent spectator of the recent conflict in the Middle East. At the height of the hostilities Belarus invited children from war-ravaged States to come to Belarus for health rehabilitation.

The adherence of Belarus to the cause of development is also sincere and firm. Implementation of the international development agenda will be the indisputable priority of our work in the Economic and Social Council. What is most important is that we have the know-how to do it. Having been left 15 years ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, without natural resources and foreign markets, without a national currency and international assistance, we have achieved our economic and social objectives. They may be considered modest when compared to those of the most developed countries, but they are of critical importance as a stage in our movement forward, as evidence of what a medium-sized State can achieve in the most difficult of circumstances.

Among other hardships, we had to deal on our own with the Chernobyl disaster, whose radioactive contamination affected more than 20 per cent of our population and made it impossible to use more than 20 per cent of arable land and 30 per cent of forests. Chernobyl's direct damage in Belarus alone is equivalent to 35 annual national budgets. It is more than appropriate to recall today, in the year of its twentieth anniversary, the largest man-made disaster in the history of mankind.

Having overcome a 50 per cent decline in the economy, and having rejected formulas that the International Monetary Fund tried to impose upon us, Belarus was the first country of the Commonwealth of Independent States to restore gross domestic product to its peak Soviet value and then raise the level to 120 per cent of that value. We have created a market economy with a strong social emphasis. We have preserved free education, including higher education, and health care, as well as the high quality and availability of social services for all people without exception. We have reduced unemployment to 1.5 per cent, and we are successfully curbing inflation.

I am confident that the experience, approach and knowledge of Belarus will be a useful contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council on the Millennium Development Goals. If the majority of nations give us the credit of trust, we will most actively and persistently work for a stronger role for the Council in addressing the development challenges. Together with those who share these approaches, we will work to reform the social and economic sphere of the United Nations. Reform measures are not working yet. Without them the activity of different United Nations funds and programmes at country level can never be effective. To continue a "business as usual" approach in these matters would mean leaving the Millennium Development Goals on paper.

There is also a large debit balance in United Nations activities outside the Economic and Social Council. There has been no substantial movement towards the enhancement of the role of the General Assembly as a principal organ of the United Nations. So far there has been no progress in reorganizing the Security Council, a key element in United Nations reform. The sluggishness of the Security Council in addressing the situation in Lebanon has not only caused sorrow and frustration, but once again convinces us of the disparity between the Security Council and the image of the world as we know it today.

Having made right and important steps in the human rights area after the 2005 World Summit, the international community should take new actions at this session. They should be aimed at a true promotion of human rights and protection of the real victims of human rights violations, and not at getting even with disagreeable nations by abusing an unjust instrument of country-specific resolutions.

As a major step towards the practical promotion of human rights and the protection of victims of one of the most acute and painful phenomena of the modern world, Belarus has, together with a number of partners, elaborated a draft resolution on improving international coordination in fighting human trafficking, and will present it to the Assembly at this session. The global scale of that challenge requires from all of us not shallow talk, but truly coordinated and purposeful actions. We see the goal of these efforts as the

elaboration of a United Nations strategy to fight human trafficking. I ask the Assembly to support the establishment of a systems-based approach to a global partnership against slavery and trafficking in human beings. Who else but the United Nations should care about the dozens, hundreds and perhaps millions of victims — above all, women and children — of modern slavery? Who else but the United Nations should encourage better international coordination in eradicating this phenomenon, which is an utter disgrace in our century?

At the World Summit many leaders spoke about the spirit of San Francisco. The spirit of San Francisco in 1944 and 1945 came from the sense of responsibility of nations in dealing with the problems of the world, not responsibility for their own narrow interests — that is obvious and simple — but for a common cause. That spirit became possible as a result of the huge disaster of the Second World War, with about 60 million deaths and the inconceivable suffering of hundreds of millions. Do we also need a huge disaster to restore that spirit? I am sure we do not. I hope that we have all learned the lessons of history.

After an era of romantic ideals and their tragic failure in the 1990s, mankind today is coming to a more elaborate perception of what kind of world order it needs. The Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana has demonstrated the clear aspiration of the majority of the nations of the world to move from the self-exhausted unipolar world to the multipolar world, fair and stable, based on the interdependence of diverse global and regional centres of power, to a world fit for all. The Havana Summit has shown that humanity should be humane. That should be the United Nations motto for a challenging twenty-first century.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate you, Madam President, and your fraternal country, Bahrain, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. You are the first Arab woman ever to assume this high position. Your selection to this post is proof that the empowerment of women has become an integral part of the Arab experience.

I should be remiss if I failed to express to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, our sincere appreciation for the efforts he made to bring a successful conclusion to the work of last session. I also express our thanks to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his efforts leading the Organization for the past ten years. We appreciate the constructive efforts he exerted during his last visit to the Middle East.

For decades the Middle East region has been the stage for many daunting and exacerbated challenges. It has endured continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories since 1967 and the denial of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Peoples of our region have lost hope of realizing their aspirations to justice, peace and security. A short time ago Israel launched its destructive war against Lebanon. The Palestinian situation, in the grip of Israeli occupation, continues to deteriorate. Acts of aggression are on the rise while the rights of the people continue to be trampled under foot. Palestinians are subjected to a crippling blockade because the advocates of democracy were dissatisfied with the results of elections in the Palestinian territories.

Our region is in the grip of a volatile situation brought about by a protracted and relentless occupation. There are few, if any, prospects for change that will hold the promise of a safe, just and stable life for our people. Can we turn the current situation into a prelude to the solution rather than a consecration of tension and confrontation?

That important question is essential to understanding the suffering of our peoples. For decades they have been yearning for the realization of a just and comprehensive peace through a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that will end occupation, restore rights, and allow for the realization of the objectives of development. That is the path to take in order to address the root causes of the problems of the region before talking about a new or a greater Middle East.

The international community must realize that continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the hotbed of all the problems of the region. It is the origin of the encompassing anger that consumes its peoples. I wonder, is the region destined to live one endless war after another? Can any one expect our people to draw comfort and satisfaction from the occupation of their territories and the violation of their rights? Are they expected to exalt the financers and supporters of this

persistent injustice, who can redress it only if they are willing? Is the region destined to endure a new war, complementing the war against Lebanon, in favour of a new Middle East, and recalling once again the birthpangs of bloodshed and destruction during the war against Lebanon, instead of embracing the opportunity to open the door to peace in the region?

The suffering of the Palestinian people continues and their tragedy has heightened over the years. Some members of the international community have become accustomed to dealing with the suffering as if it were a natural phenomenon, not an unprecedented humanitarian and national tragedy. We in Syria are victims of that tragedy in all its aspects and are influenced by its repercussions. We support the efforts of our Palestinian brothers to close their ranks and encourage them to form a Government of national unity. The suffering of our people in the occupied Syrian Golan continues as well and all Syrians suffer because of this occupation.

From this rostrum I salute the struggle and steadfastness of our people in the Golan and in Palestine in the face of the Israeli policies of tyranny and terrorism. It is extremely important for the international community to recognize that the deep-rooted anger and resentment consuming our region, particularly after the senseless war against Lebanon, and the continued logjam in efforts for peace, constitute a dangerous and complex situation and can only lead to confrontation instead of peace. This will not serve the interests of anyone, inside the region or outside it. We too want a new Middle East, one where a just and comprehensive peace prevails, based on right, justice, and guaranteeing the same security to all.

Fifteen years ago Syria declared that the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace was its strategic choice. It took part in the peace process that began in Madrid, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. Negotiations continued for 10 years but did not bear fruit. The Syrian Golan continues to be under occupation and peace remains elusive. It was clear beyond any doubt that the Israeli political will to make peace was non-existent. Peacemaking first requires political will, to be followed by the implementation of the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Israel launched a brutal war against Lebanon, destroying life and property. Thanks to the courageous Lebanese resistance, its honourable steadfastness and its national unity, Lebanon warded off the aggression and defeated the aggressor. The Security Council ultimately adopted its long-awaited resolution 1701 (2006), and my country, Syria, said it would cooperate with the United Nations to implement that resolution.

Syria adopted the necessary measures to control its borders with fraternal Lebanon. Syria is committed to Lebanon's independence and sovereignty and demands the withdrawal of Israel from all Lebanese occupied territories, including from the Lebanese Sheba'a farms. We hope that Lebanon will be able to overcome the consequences of the Israeli aggression through the unity of its people and the assistance provided by its brothers, friends, and the international community, so that it will recover and be prosperous again. I stress here Syria's commitment to the establishment of good relations with Lebanon in the interests of the two fraternal peoples and countries.

On the other side of the Syrian border, Iraq is enduring extremely distressing circumstances that are causing us serious concern as both a brother of Iraq and a neighbouring country. Syria supported the political process in Iraq. I reaffirm today our support for the Iraqi Government that came to power after elections in which all segments of the Iraqi people participated. We express Syria's readiness to cooperate with this Government in all fields. We support the Iraqi Government's plan for national reconciliation and stand ready to provide all the necessary support, because we are committed to the unity of Iraq and its people.

Drawing up a schedule for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq is essential, since it will assist in curbing the violence and ensuring the safety and security of its citizens. Syria, which mourns every drop of Iraqi blood shed, repeats its condemnation of all the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be perpetrated in Iraq, resulting in a high toll among innocent Iraqi citizens.

Five years have passed since the terrorist criminal act of 11 September 2001, which left thousands of innocent people dead. I repeat our condemnation of that act and our sympathy with the victims of that heinous terrorist crime. To the American people, who were the force behind great scientific achievements

that benefited humanity, I say, "You are the victims of policies that were proved wrong in the Arab and other regions of the world." Many innocent people in places so distant from the United States of America have unfortunately paid the price and suffered the dire consequences of those failed policies.

Tragically enough, we all end up paying a heavy price when the decision makers in Washington believe that they know better and are in a better position to understand and grasp the needs and circumstances of the Arabs. They diagnose the ambitions and aspirations of the Arab individual in a manner that is tailored to their own vision.

The fact is that we, the people of the region, know our circumstances and the priorities of the millions angered by the denial of their sovereign, national rights. If anyone asked the angry millions about their priorities and objectives, the sure answer would be "We want an end to the Israeli occupation of our lands in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan. We want to recover all our usurped rights. We want the flow of American weapons to Israel, which are sowing death and destruction, to stop. We refuse hegemony over our resources and interference in our affairs. We want a Middle East governed by peace and built on right and justice, a Middle East where people can dedicate all their energies and resources to development and progress and embrace the positive trends in contemporary human thought and endeavour."

After years of the war on terror, one asks "Has the world become a safer place?" It is clear that the war did not achieve its objective and that terror has become more widespread. That could be explained by the fact that combating terrorism exclusively through the use of force accomplishes nothing unless the root causes of terrorism are addressed. We must mobilize the efforts of the international community to deal with this dangerous scourge, taking into account the need to distinguish between fighting terrorism and people's legitimate right to resist foreign occupation.

We also believe that the war on terror has been misused at times. It looked as if it was masking the clash of cultures and civilizations, which eventually not only proved detrimental to the interests of all the parties concerned but also played into the hands of terrorists and terrorism.

Israel is the sole Power in possession of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. It refuses to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to submit to the comprehensive safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. That poses a threat to peace and security in the region. On 29 December 2003, on behalf of the Arab Group, Syria submitted to the Security Council a draft resolution to rid the Middle East region of all weapons of mass destruction. We still hope to adopt that resolution as soon as possible.

My country joins many other developing countries that have expressed concern over the restrictions on access by Member States, particularly developing countries, to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In conclusion I stress that the Middle East currently stands at a crossroads. It has the option either to take the road to justice, peace and security, or be faced, even more than before, with tension and confrontation that would not be in the interests of any party inside or outside the region. It is up to the parties concerned to understand the danger inherent in turning our backs on the road to peace, not yet taken. Everything also hinges on the active role that our international Organization must play to maintain international peace and security, beginning with the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). I hope that objectivity and the desire for peace will trump other options so that the Middle East can be ushered into a new, secure and prosperous era after decades of suffering.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Antonio García Belaúnde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru.

Mr. García Belaúnde (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, allow me to express to you, Madam President, our congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I should also like to convey to you the best wishes of the people and Government of Peru for a successful stewardship. We are ready to work with you for the benefit of the international community.

When the Government of President Alan García took office on 28 July it found a particularly serious social deficit in the country. More than 13 million Peruvians, half our population, live in poverty; 5 million of them, or 20 per cent of our population, live in extreme poverty. Peru is therefore experiencing a

situation of deep inequity for a medium-income country.

In order to tackle this reality, the new Government has placed major emphasis on responsible State action, designing an agenda of social inclusion based on promoting investment for job creation. That agenda requires that we learn to act with greater solidarity, on the basis of civic values, with due attention given to the most vulnerable groups, so that they may fully participate in drawing up public policies. Initial action is aimed at restoring confidence in our society as a factor crucial for promoting long-term development and shared growth. In this respect, my Government is working with the social sectors to develop a culture of duty as one of the main pillars supporting Government policies and the relationship between society and the State.

The Government of Peru has made the fight against poverty a central priority of its Administration. It has also set the guidelines for its external action, in which it aims to join the other nations of the Latin American region in drawing up a development agenda to achieve growth with equity and social inclusion. In this context, we reaffirm our conviction of the need to promote Latin American integration. For this purpose we are working on strengthening the Andean Community and building the South American Community of Nations.

That is the goal that inspires us, because in order to express the common interests of our continent in a world such as today's we must act together to better tackle the challenges of globalization. A Latin America with a united voice will be better placed to tackle its common problems, such as the marginalization of wide sectors of the population, internal imbalances and social divisions. A more united Latin America can also better project the values of democracy and pluralism that characterize it today. In this framework, tolerance and respect for differences will make it possible to strengthen projects of common interest offering all our citizens true opportunities for development and well-being.

One of the challenges that our continent, and in particular the Andean region, must face decisively is the fight against drug trafficking. Peru reaffirms its firm position of combating forcefully and comprehensively the illicit trafficking of drugs, emphasizing the principles of multilateralism and shared responsibility. To that end, we have been carrying out a careful evaluation of the current state of cooperation in the fight against illegal drug trafficking. Following the principle of shared responsibility, Peru has expressed an interest in holding an anti-drug summit, so that in the Andean area we can give new impetus to the dialogue on cooperation and agree with the United States and the European Union on a single consensus strategy, which would be mutually beneficial for the Andean producer countries and the large consumer markets.

Another universal scourge that the international community must fight unrelentingly is terrorism. Peru reiterates that terrorism, whatever its form or manifestation, or its motivation, is unacceptable and accordingly must be condemned and fought. States must show an unequivocal attitude towards terrorism. Peru therefore supports the efforts being made in the United Nations to fight terrorism. Among them, we note the approval of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We reaffirm our conviction that this struggle can and must be carried out with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the Millennium Declaration we set ourselves the target of attaining by 2015 various goals in the fight against poverty and in the partnership for development, goals which summarize the challenges that countries such as Peru must tackle and overcome and the cooperation that developed countries must give in assisting development, trade and financing. However, at the 2005 World Summit we noted that progress in compliance with the Millennium Development Goals is somewhat modest, and some goals seem unattainable.

In order to comply with the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Peru has taken immediate action, including, first, reform of the State and the political system to give it more austerity, through decentralization, administrative simplification and moral initiatives; secondly, job creation through investment and the opportunities that the State must promote; thirdly, restoration of labour and social rights in order to have a more modern and just society; fourthly, policies in favour of women, youth and children; and, fifthly, civic security to give the population tranquillity and confidence. None of that will be enough if the markets of developed countries remain closed to our products through restrictions. In

this context, we call for the prompt resumption of the Doha Round talks in a spirit of compromise.

My Government's social policy initiatives will make possible a broader exercise of human rights. I refer in particular to economic, social and cultural rights, where shortcomings are evident, and to paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups.

In this respect, during the current session we will be called upon to consider and possibly adopt three important international instruments on promoting and protecting human rights. The first two are the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and the draft international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Peru urges every Member State to consider adopting these two instruments, which would give greater protection to millions of people who today are victims of marginalization. The third instrument is the draft convention on forced disappearance, which will make it possible to more effectively combat that reprehensible practice.

We are aware of the importance of multilateralism as the ideal context for low- and medium-income countries to take part in the international arena, as well as helping to find solutions to the challenges that the globalized world must face. These challenges result from the current characteristics of the international system, in which two opposing processes coexist. Thus, while the world integrates globally it is becoming more fragmented because of an increase in social inequality, the proliferation of civil conflicts and the disintegration of States, so-called ethnic cleansing, massive violations of human rights, the trafficking of people and arms, environmental degradation, terrorism and international organized crime.

These contradictory trends between globalization and fragmentation often call into question both the ability of States to govern and international stability, the major challenges that the international community, and in particular the Security Council, must face. Therefore, we need a comprehensive and strategic vision to make it possible to deal with problems affecting international peace and security. It is not only military aspects that cause crises. There are also structural factors, such as poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation, which are the triggers of national and international instability.

If the Council does not take this reality into account it will be very difficult to prevent or resolve conflicts in a sustainable way, because it will mean putting to one side the most important variables. We therefore acknowledge the need to make the multilateral system more flexible, comprehensive and effective, in order to tackle the global challenges and threats. But, at the same time, the Security Council's actions must be based on legitimacy, which accords the strictest respect for the values, purposes and principles of the Charter and international law. With this conviction, Peru is taking part in the Security Council in a coherent way and with a constructive spirit.

Given this premise, it is crucial to strengthen the disarmament and non-proliferation regimes and to find a peaceful solution to disputes. We supported the peacekeeping interventions authorized by the Security Council, and we will continue those efforts to ensure a renewed collective security system supported and respected by all Member States, in order to tackle threats to international peace and security. It is in this context that we see Peru's participation in peacekeeping operations in Haiti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi and Cyprus. This involves very sensitive matters and arduous responsibilities, but we assume them as a natural corollary to the commitment to international peace and security that we made when signing the Charter. We affirm our confidence that the Peacebuilding Commission will achieve the objective of supporting the reconstruction of countries emerging from conflict.

At the same time, we believe that we must step up our prevention efforts at the regional and subregional levels, which is why Peru promotes cooperative security through mechanisms to strengthen peace and security structures, whose development includes the need to prevent arms races between neighbouring countries.

Peru supports reform of the Security Council to make it more effective, transparent and representative. In this process, we favour increasing the number of members through dialogue and consensus, as part of a comprehensive process of United Nations reform, in which we have already seen some progress. The road ahead must be tackled with greater responsibility and in a spirit of dialogue and openness.

I wanted to share these concerns and ideas in order to reaffirm that Peru, on the basis of its own economic and social reality and its regional outreach, as well as its profound multilateral vocation, wishes to continue to contribute constructively to security, development and respect for human rights in the world. We are convinced that the United Nations system can, with the help of all, strengthen its central role of promoting social progress and raising the standard of living within the broadest concept of freedom, as stipulated in the Preamble to the Charter.

Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Zarifou Ayeva, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of Togo.

Mr. Ayeva (Togo) (*spoke in French*): First, on behalf of our delegation, I warmly congratulate the President on her election to preside over this session, which encourages the Government of Togo in its commitment to value the role of women in our society. Togo remains convinced that the specific insights of women in the management of national or international affairs will make a big contribution to giving a more united and human face to relations between peoples and nations. The President can rest assured that as she does her inspiring job Togo will continue to support her unstintingly.

I also pay a merited tribute to the President's predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, whose competence, moderation, sense of compromise and character earned him the respect and esteem of all during the last session.

In addition, I pay particular tribute to the Secretary-General, and express to him our sincere gratitude for his tireless efforts for peace, democracy and development. We appreciate his commitment and his bold proposals to ensure substantial and fair reform of the United Nations.

In our quest for peace, security and socio-economic development Togo has just reached a critical stage in its history, with the signing on 20 August of the Comprehensive Political Agreement at the end of an open, constructive and inclusive dialogue. When the Head of State took the initiative to resume the political dialogue we were aware that our current stage of social and political development would not allow us to deal with all matters of discord or eliminate all political and institutional problems. It was necessary first to strengthen the dynamic of national mobilization and social cohesion by promoting a policy of openness, calm and national reconciliation.

The desired results have largely been achieved, with the effective and active participation of all the major political participants in the dialogue. Everyone was able to speak freely on the substantive problems that were feeding the persistent feeling of crisis. The frank and responsible discussions, and the conclusions reached, enable us to establish bolder conditions for reform and lay the foundations for a new covenant for the republic and for national harmony.

The conclusions of the national dialogue favour the holding of free and democratic elections. Additionally, the resolution of the dialogue regarding the need to re-examine the role and mission of the army and the other security services allows us to anticipate an unprecedented strengthening of measures to maintain public order and provide more security for the activities of political parties and various other organizations, as well as the electoral processes.

After the social dialogue — involving employers, unions and the Government, and a number of bold measures aimed at youth and workers of all categories — a milestone will be reached with the holding of free legislative elections, pluralist and transparent, in the very near future. Togo will then have satisfied all the commitments made to the European Union on 14 April 2004 in Brussels.

In an attempt to give every opportunity for national harmony, implement the conclusions of the political dialogue and establish sustainable democracy, a broad-based Government of National Unity was established on 20 September 2006. All sections of the Togolese people, in their political, social and regional diversity, are represented in it. All the changes under way in Togolese society were made possible by the support of the international community, the maturity of the people of Togo and, of course, the sense of compromise of the political class.

We are very grateful to all our international partners who assisted us during this process of peacebuilding in our country. Our appreciation goes in particular to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the European

Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, France, Germany, the United States of America and all African heads of State, who have always been very attentive to what we have had to say. I wish also, and very particularly, to express to the Facilitator, Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso, the gratitude of our entire Government and people for his critical role in the conclusion and signing of the Comprehensive Political Agreement.

Consolidating peace in Togo and the success of our democratization process remain closely linked to the stability of the regional and international environment. Therefore, Togo continues to be concerned about the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Given the many preconditions for organizing elections in that neighbouring country, there must be concern, from any point of view, about the fulfilment of the mission for which the United Nations is responsible. We hope that the resolution of those preconditions will permit the holding of free and democratic elections leading Côte d'Ivoire to sustainable peace.

Similarly, with regard to the region of Darfur and Somalia, in the absence of a much more vigorous voluntary mobilization by the international community to end the cycle of violence and the tragedy of the peoples concerned, peace will not come soon to that part of Africa.

In other parts of the world, the continuing developments in both Iraq and the Middle East are a major source of concern for the Government of Togo. Togo firmly believes it is high time that the people of Iraq were reconciled and that the international community provided all the necessary support for their Government to help it complete the reconciliation process. It should be emphasized that the countries of the subregion have an important role to play in the quest for peace in Iraq.

The tragedy that unfolded in Lebanon weighs on our conscience. Togo welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), whose effective implementation will permit the return of peace to the country.

At the heart of the Middle East conflict is the thorny question of Palestine. Sustainable peace in the region requires an end to the continuous cycle of violence and a climate of confidence, which would make possible talks to create a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel, the two of them coexisting within secure and internationally recognized borders.

While the resolution of crises and conflicts remains at the heart of our concerns, everything must be done to consolidate peace in countries emerging from conflicts, or countries which, after great efforts, have succeeded in their democratization process. Therefore, the Peacebuilding Commission must play a vital role in African countries emerging from conflicts. We are pleased that it is already considering the situation in Burundi and Sierra Leone. It must also help Liberia to strengthen its regained peace and make sure that Guinea-Bissau does not sink into violence. Similarly, while we welcome the holding of legislative and presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo calls on the international community to pay sustained attention to that country so as to assist it until its still fragile process is completed.

Disarmament efforts by the international community are still far from producing the desired results. On the Korean peninsula the nuclear question is still unresolved, and there is a need for a strengthening of mutual confidence among the States concerned. Therefore, my country firmly supports every effort to resolve the region's security questions peacefully. We believe also that the question of the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be resolved without negotiations between the interested parties, and we call on them to create conditions conducive to such talks. It would not be wise to stop the country, by whatever means, developing a nuclear programme, essentially peaceful, for its fundamental research needs and the socio-economic development of its population.

With respect to small arms and light weapons, Togo regrets that the international community was unable to successfully conclude the July 2006 New York United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted in 2001. The failure of that Conference is not encouraging for regional and subregional initiatives. At the same time, the adoption in June this year of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials is very much part of strengthening confidence-building measures among States in the subregion. It is to be hoped that at this

session the General Assembly will seriously examine the question of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which are a destabilizing factor for African States in particular, and a threat to the peace and security of people in general.

I should also like to emphasize the importance of our collective responsibility to counter terrorism and human rights violations. The reply of the international community to terrorism should be appropriate and should correspond to the expectations of peoples who only wish to live in a world free from fear. The General Assembly's adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is to be welcomed. We hope that the Human Rights Council will contribute to strengthening the capacity of States to promote and protect human rights by developing and implementing appropriate strategies and programmes. Accordingly, on 10 July the Government concluded an agreement on establishing an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Togo.

The current state of the world — characterized by a considerable increase in United Nations membership, from 51 Member States in 1945 to 192 in 2006, the emergence of new Powers, the persistence of certain conflicts and especially the frequent paralysis in the Security Council — requires that the United Nations be reformed as soon as possible, as the September 2005 World Summit recommended. While the objective of reform is to make the Organization more effective and efficient, we must not lose sight of the fact that a central, urgent factor is Security Council reform. If that is not included, the reform will be unfinished business.

Decisions related to economic development and the elimination of poverty adopted by the September 2005 World Summit have rekindled hope about the will of the rich industrialized countries to assist the countries of the South to promote sustainable development for their peoples. Implementation of the commitments made would permit achievement of the goals. Therefore, the countries of the South ask the countries of the North to commit themselves not only to keep their promises to make a genuine contribution to reducing poverty by 50 per cent by 2015, but finally to eradicate it.

As the Assembly is well aware, the support of the rich industrialized countries will enable us to consolidate the efforts that the countries of the South continue to make, efforts which have allowed us to improve macroeconomic management by tackling inflation and consolidating a balanced budget. However, the global incidence of extreme poverty has not declined, especially in the less developed countries, where combating poverty is still a very difficult task.

The situation that I have just described is exacerbated by factors that the developing countries have not been able to master. They include, to mention just a few: the external debt, deterioration in the terms of trade, the weakness of official development assistance, and environmental degradation. Moreover, the HIV/AIDS pandemic presents a major challenge to growth and economic development. Major conferences organized under United Nations auspices are slow to yield results. The status review of the Millennium Development Goals, held in September 2005, and the failure of the Doha Round and the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, held on 18 and 19 September, have shown that there are still barriers to implementing the commitments made.

It is therefore regrettable that development partners have not always honoured their official development commitments to the least developed countries. Nevertheless, promises made recently, in particular by the G-8 Summit in 2005, regarding an increase in assistance and debt relief, have given us reason for some optimism. Additionally, access to markets and the gradual elimination of agricultural subsidies by all countries simultaneously, on dates set by the World Trade Organization, would contribute to the development of poor countries, since agriculture is the basis of the existence of hundreds of millions of people in the least developed countries. For Togo it is essential that progress be made in resolving questions relating to cotton, in particular, questions that remain vital for many developing countries.

My country welcomes the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held on 14 and 15 September, during which the General Assembly dealt with the multiple aspects of international migration. We must do more in-depth thinking on ways to stem the tide of the massive and hazardous exodus to northern countries. An arsenal of repressive measures alone will not resolve a situation that is becoming more and more like a scourge.

In conclusion, I emphasize that if we are faithful to our common destiny and our worldwide partnership

based on solidarity we can realize the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, the countries of both the North and the South must honour their commitments, thus contributing to ending the suffering of millions of disinherited people throughout the world and to promoting international peace and security.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Choe Su Hon, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Choe Su Hon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me first, on behalf of my delegation, to congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President and to express my conviction that the session will be successful under her able leadership.

The desire of humankind for a peaceful and prosperous world in the new century is still faced with grave challenges. The unilateralism and high-handed acts of the super-Power are becoming so reckless as to trample on the principles of respect for the sovereign equality of all States, the fundamental basis of the United Nations Charter, thereby arousing international society's serious concern. Worse still are the invasions of sovereign States, either openly committed or disregarded, and even fanned under the pretext of non-proliferation and anti-terrorism, giving rise to the massacre of innocent people and the destruction of international peace and security.

The threats and high-handed acts of the super-Power are becoming more and more obvious, with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as their target. The United States adventurous military manoeuvres, such as military exercises and an economic blockade of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, continue to be tolerated, while the routine missile test-firings of our army for self-defence have been condemned as a threat to international peace and security. Such a reality is a serious lesson to us all that a country with powerful strength, a just deterrent, is capable of safeguarding the dignity and sovereignty of a nation by itself.

Herein lies the necessity and justness of the Songun policy of General Kim Jong Il, the respected leader of our people. The Songun policy is a sure guarantee of the ability of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to safeguard its sovereignty and security and ensure peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, and in the region as a whole, in the face of the ever-hardening, hostile policy of the United States towards it. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's possession of deterrent power, solely for self-defence, is also fully in line with the interest of the countries of the region in peace and security and a peaceful environment.

As is well known, the Korean people have suffered a tragic history; after the nearly half-century-long tyrannical military occupation by Japan they have been living in a state of war with the United States for 60 years. Against this background, the Korean people aspire for peace more than any other country. Today there persist on the Korean peninsula touch-and-go critical tension and confrontation, rather than durable peace and security. The source is none other than the vicious, hostile policy of the United States towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula is not exceptional either, as it originates from United States nuclear threats. The United States policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has gone beyond mere hostility, going so far as to pose nuclear threats, even by designating it part of an "axis of evil" and the target of pre-emptive strikes, thus driving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to inevitably possess a nuclear deterrent. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea maintains its consistent position of seeking to resolve the issue of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula peacefully through dialogue and negotiation.

As the world knows well, the core elements stipulated in the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, adopted at the six-party talks, are the respective commitments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States to abandon its nuclear programme and to live in peaceful coexistence. As for the Joint Statement, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains committed to implementing all its agreed provisions on an equal footing. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is sure to get greater benefit from implementation of the agreed provisions of the talks. That is why it is willing, more than any other country, to hold the talks. However, the United States, soon after the announcement of that Joint Statement, wasted no time in imposing financial sanctions upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a dialogue partner, eventually scrapping the

already agreed itinerary for the following rounds of the Talks and creating the present impasse.

In view of these facts, it is crystal clear that the United States is not in favour of the six-party talks and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. If there is anything that the United States does favour, it is aggravated tension on the Korean peninsula, to be used as a pretext to reinforce its military forces in the north-east Asian region. By doing so, the United States aims to strengthen its armed forces in the region and thus contain the ever-growing, strong Democratic People's Republic of Korea and neighbouring countries within its world supremacy strategy. That is the real intention of the United States.

It is quite preposterous that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, under the groundless United States sanctions, takes part in the Talks to discuss its own nuclear abandonment. That is the matter of principle on which even the slightest concession cannot be tolerated. I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Member States of the United Nations for their continued support for and encouragement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in its efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula.

As for Korea's reunification, it is the supreme aspiration of our nation to realize it at the earliest possible date as a prerequisite to ensuring lasting peace and security on the Korean peninsula. The North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000 is a declaration on realizing independence and peaceful reunification by the Korean nation itself, rejecting foreign interference. Regrettably, however, on 21 September the South Korean Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade made distorted remarks about the root causes of the tension in the Korean peninsula, without saying a single word about implementation of the North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000. That causes us consternation.

It is already well known that the major factors undermining peace and stability and aggravating tension in the Korean peninsula are the United States military presence in South Korea; its doctrine of pre-emptive nuclear strike against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; incessant large-scale joint United States and South Korea military exercises; the mass delivery to South Korea of all sorts of military equipment, including weapons of mass destruction; and aerial reconnaissance carried out by the United States a hundred-odd times every month.

The North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June has not been smoothly implemented so far, because of the persistent manoeuvres of the United States, which dislikes improved inter-Korean relations, and because of the existence in South Korea of such legal mechanisms as the national security law stipulating fellow countrymen as enemies and denying even basic human rights, which is against the ideals of "By our nation itself", the core of the Joint Declaration. Those are undeniable facts.

By upholding the banner of the North-South Joint Declaration, and under the ideals of "By our nation itself", the Government of our Republic will surely achieve national reunification by firmly realizing cooperation in the three areas of national independence, peace against war, and patriotism for reunification.

For the United Nations to fulfil its mission for the maintenance of international peace and security, practical measures should be taken to reject unilateralism and high-handed acts that block the establishment of equitable and just international relations. Furthermore, the United Nations should be democratized so that all international issues are resolved in conformity with the common interests of Member States.

In this regard, we are of the view that one of the reasonable ways to effect that is to hand over from the Security Council to the General Assembly the power to pass resolutions on issues directly linked to international peace and security, such as the use of force. It is also imperative to ensure that the Security Council, responsible for international peace and security, strictly observe the principle of fairness in its activities. It should be accountable to the General Assembly by making a real contribution to international peace and security, not a means for certain countries to legalize their strategic interests.

The fact that the Security Council remains indifferent to the infringement of sovereignty and the massacre of civilians in Arab territories — such as the United States invasion of Iraq and Israel's aggression in Lebanon — is a typical example of the irresponsibility, unfairness and double standards in its activities. The reform of the Security Council now under consideration should focus on ensuring fairness

in its activities, first and foremost, and ensure that the non-aligned and developing countries, which make up the overwhelming majority of Member States, are fully represented.

With regard to expansion of the permanent membership of the Council, a country like Japan, the war criminal which invaded Asian countries and massacred innocent people, but which has been distorting its aggressive history instead of liquidating it, should never be allowed to become a permanent member.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to develop relations of friendship and cooperation with all Member States that respect its sovereignty, in accordance with the ideals of its foreign policy — independence, peace and friendship — and will make an active contribution to the efforts of international society to achieve world peace and security and sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sven Jürgenson, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I begin by congratulating Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalaifa on her assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly. We have full confidence in her and wish her every success. I should also like to praise Foreign Minister Jan Eliasson for his effective leadership during the Assembly's sixtieth session, which achieved truly noteworthy results.

I also warmly welcome the Republic of Montenegro as the 192nd Member of the United Nations.

The United Nations confronts huge tasks. There has already been remarkable progress in certain reform areas, such as the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Peacebuilding Commission. We also attach great importance to the launching of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which calls for enhanced United Nations measures to deal with terrorism and for the better coordination of such efforts.

Estonia is strongly committed to promoting peace and security throughout the world. We have been following developments in the Middle East with concern and compassion. The recent events have once again demonstrated that, in addition to the need to secure lasting peace, there is a need for prompt action and generous contributions from the international community to resolve humanitarian crises. Estonia has not been a bystander. We have been responding to the dire needs of the people in Lebanon and have provided assistance to the Iraqi people so that they can rebuild their country.

Estonia continues to actively support the United Nations in promoting peace and security, just as we support the Organization's important role in international development. We remain convinced that the United Nations is an answer to both current and future threats and divisions in the world. As we fully subscribe to the comprehensive statement delivered by the President of Finland on behalf of the European Union, let me briefly highlight some aspects of global partnership to which we attach great value.

One of the main aims of the Millennium Development Goals is to develop a global partnership for development. That encompasses a commitment to good governance and the efficient functioning of democratic institutions, as well as to fully respecting human rights and the rule of law for the sustainability of development efforts. As was emphasized in the Final Document of the 2005 World Summit, no country can tackle today's complex challenges alone. While all nations bear the principal responsibility for their own development, their individual efforts should be supported by concrete global actions and programmes. Partnership is truly a central element in everything we do.

Joint global action is most urgently needed when a disaster hits a country or a whole region. For a timely and efficient response from the international community, a well-coordinated and properly resourced global disaster relief system is required. Estonia gives increasingly high priority to the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance at the global level, and finds it important to further strengthen the United Nations humanitarian response capabilities. The first year of the Central Emergency Response Fund has been a promising step towards a balanced and more responsive international humanitarian system, although many challenges remain. We are committed to further increasing our financial contribution to the United Nations humanitarian system disaster relief assistance.

In this regard, it is important to always ensure that disaster relief and all other development activities

favour environmentally sustainable solutions. Environmental sustainability is an urgent, but at the same time long-term, task which demands common action. Estonia attaches great importance to the need for coordination and coherence in the field of environment-related activities, and supports the creation of a more coherent institutional framework within the United Nations.

The fulfilment of the internationally agreed development goals calls for the engagement of not only Governments and intergovernmental bodies; the commitments made at major conferences cannot be implemented without cooperation with local institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Our experience clearly demonstrates that non-governmental organizations can play a crucial role in effective development cooperation. In many cases civil society institutions are much more efficient in establishing dynamic working relationships with non-governmental organizations of partner countries than government institutions. The cooperation with non-governmental organizations has been remarkably advantageous in such sectors as sustainable development and information and communication technology, as well as e-governance.

This brings us to another area of cooperation — using information and communication technology to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Since my country has been notably successful in employing new information and communication technologies, as well as in carrying out extensive reforms, we shall continue to increase our input into overall development in this field.

There is also a need to reinvigorate and reform the United Nations. Estonia is ready to contribute to the best of its ability to the development of a comprehensive information and communication technologies strategy for the whole United Nations structure. All these issues — information technology, sustainable development and humanitarian and disaster relief — are also on the agenda of the Second Committee, which will be chaired by the Permanent Representative of Estonia during this sixty-first session. We will do our utmost there to see to the effective promotion of the matters I have mentioned — and, of course, all other crucial matters before the Committee.

We must remain strongly committed to respect for the rule of law and our rights and dignity as human beings. Indeed, if we want human rights to form one of the three main pillars of the United Nations, alongside security and development, it is essential to implement both the letter and spirit of resolution 60/251. We expect the Human Rights Council to be strengthened and become an authoritative institution, and we expect human rights issues to gain equal standing with other major items on the United Nations agenda. This first year of the existence of the Human Rights Council is a year of transition and capacity-building. Estonia's vision encompasses the establishment of an operational body reinforced with special procedures and a new efficient and universal mechanism, which monitors individual countries, with non-governmental organizations as essential partners.

We should also make sure that the rights of indigenous peoples remain an integral part of human rights and continue to be a matter of substance for the Human Rights Council. Adopting the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples during the current session is of great importance for the millions of indigenous peoples worldwide. It is crucial that it be adopted at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly this year. Its implementation could be a major step towards eliminating the widespread human rights violations suffered by many indigenous peoples. The Human Rights Council could also host a forum for dialogue where the representatives of indigenous peoples, States and a special rapporteur could discuss the issues enshrined in the Declaration.

Another new instrument that needs to be adopted by the General Assembly and implemented by States as soon as possible is the draft convention on enforced disappearances — a recurrent phenomenon that must be fought against. It is essential that it be adopted at the current session so that States can start to sign and ratify it at the beginning of next year in Paris.

The Millennium Development Goals are also intended to promote gender equality and empower women worldwide. That includes, of course, the United Nations. Estonia shares the vision that the role of women within the decision-making system of the United Nations should be increased. As the General Assembly is to decide on the next Secretary-General this year, we support the proposal to consider Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga as a candidate. Thus the President of Latvia could be the first woman to head

the United Nations in its 60 years of existence. Our commitment must be reflected in our decisions. The time has come to have more representatives from central and eastern Europe in high-ranking posts in the United Nations. I believe we are ready to make history.

Before finishing, I should like to express my deepest respect for the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. We appreciate his dedication and personal determination in addressing the enormous challenges of the twenty-first century and shaping our common future. During nearly 10 years of service he has held mankind's universal values high and led the United Nations with true vision.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.